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3



BUREAU OF  
INTELLIGENCE  
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RESEARCH

(U) CHINA'S VIEW OF THE US AND THE USSR

Summary

China has adjusted its posture in the US-USSR-China triangle over the past three years, disclaiming a community of strategic interests with the US. Most recently, China has declared that Soviet power and US power are now more or less in balance, and Beijing has substantially improved its own nonpolitical ties with Moscow. Despite these changes, China's world view appears basically unaltered, and what has emerged in Chinese-US-Soviet relations is by no means an equilateral triangle.

China wants the benefits without the appearance of a close relationship with the US. In return, the Chinese are prepared to affirm by word and deed a relationship that is friendly but nonaligned. Such a relationship in Chinese eyes has to include a workable understanding on the issue of Taiwan. Notably, in contrast to "the three issues"<sup>1/</sup> dividing Beijing and Moscow, the Chinese portray Taiwan as a problem on which a Sino-American modus vivendi already has been reached; the question in their view is whether the US will fulfill its commitment.

China also accepts that the relationship will include sharp disagreement over some international issues of importance to the US and avoidance of the appearance of joining forces to oppose the Soviets. In short, China will seek a high degree of cooperation with the US but also will want respect as an autarkic, socialist, and developing world power. As this sort of relationship develops, the contradiction between China's rhetoric and its Realpolitik policies will continue and perhaps even increase.

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1/ The three issues are the Soviet military posture along the Soviet-Chinese border and Soviet involvement in Kampuchea and Afghanistan.

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View of the USSR

Although less fearful of an immediate Soviet attack, Beijing is quite aware of the continuing growth of Soviet forces around China's periphery.

[redacted] it also has confirmed China's longstanding strategic perceptions as well as the current value it places on consolidating relations with the US.

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China's fundamental differences with the USSR, however, do not appear to have diminished, and they are no less severe, although less numerous, than US-Soviet conflicts of interest. China in effect has established a normal adversarial relationship with the USSR that is somewhat similar to the mix of confrontation, negotiation, trade, and contact that characterizes US-Soviet relations.

View of the US

[redacted] In fact, because of the continued growth of the long-term Soviet threat, it probably has increased. The Chinese seem to recognize, now even more than they did in 1980, that Western economic and technological help is essential for their modernization.

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At the same time, the gap between Chinese rhetoric and actual strategic views and interests has widened. This gap had closed in 1979-81 when Beijing began to talk openly of a united front with the US against Soviet hegemonism. Since 1981, the Chinese have distanced themselves from the US, stressed their independent foreign policy, and resumed their propaganda posture of attacking both superpowers' "struggle for hegemony."

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- 2 -

China's diplomatic effectiveness was being eroded by the perception of an extreme anti-Sovietism in Chinese policy. The Reagan administration's tough stand against the Soviets and its hard line on some Third World issues also argued for putting more apparent distance between China and the US.

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Some New Shifts

President Reagan's scheduled April trip that will complete this year's exchange of high-level state visits, China's [redacted]

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agreements with the US, and willingness at least to give the impression of a budding military relationship with Washington

[redacted] These developments also suggest that a consensus in long-term US-Chinese security concerns persists. Parallel US-Chinese interests and cooperation in such vital areas as Korea, Indochina, and Afghanistan also reflect a continuing Sino-American understanding about Asia, the main element of which remains the maintenance of national stability and the containment of Soviet power and influence.

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[redacted] Second, Chinese officials keep hinting that they do not expect that future talks with the Soviets will lessen basic differences. Given the continuing Soviet buildup in the region and the muted but ongoing potential for Sino-Vietnamese conflict over Kampuchea, the Chinese well may believe that relations with the Soviets could worsen over the next few years.

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